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New Skills for Women

Technology and the Skilled Trades



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Women in Technology and the Skilled Trades

The new frontier

If you are:

- planning your first career
- considering a change in your career
or
- re-entering the work force

this brochure may be for you.

Women represent the fastest growing group in the labour force. However, most women are concentrated in a few traditionally female areas of work. Many of these jobs are routine, low paying, and provide little opportunity for advancement.

Perhaps you would like to consider some work alternatives that offer better prospects. The following pages will assist you in exploring some of these alternatives to see if jobs in technology and the skilled trades might be just what you have been looking for.

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What are these jobs?

They are the skilled jobs in construction, service and industry. Their history in some cases goes back to ancient times when metal and wood crafts were first developed. Now the materials include plastics, and our rapidly changing technology is creating a broad range of new occupations every day.

Some of the oldest trades are in the construction industry. These include carpentry, brick laying and glazing (the art of making and installing windows and glass facings).

The service sector is made up of an infinite variety of jobs designed to meet the needs of the public, business, and industry. Opportunities are here for a woman to form her own business as well as to express her artisan skills. As a baker, furrier, landscaper, auto mechanic, or repair technician, a woman can find a rewarding career.

The industrial sector encompasses primarily mining and manufacturing. In manufacturing the technology is continually changing and improving, and there is at present a critical demand for people interested in developing the required skills. Here women can learn to design, craft, and operate the machines and tools that are used by industry, as well as to test their functioning and keep them in good repair.

As women in Ontario are now legally permitted to work underground, the whole field of mining is open to them. The jobs in this sector involve hauling, blasting, and operating machinery. Mining also consists of indoor jobs such as testing and analyzing minerals, metals, and oil products.

What makes these occupations attractive?

The jobs are there

Employment projections during the past few years pointed to the 1980's as a time of rapid growth in demand for skilled labour in the trades and technology. At the present time, however, the demand is not being met. A recent survey of Ontario employers in manufacturing industries found that just under 50 percent of those surveyed were experiencing difficulty in finding the skilled workers they needed. Looking at a local need, the Hamilton Industrial Training Advisory Council estimated that that city would be short 4,000 skilled metal cutters by 1980.

Canada is no longer relying on the recruitment of immigrants to supply the skills required by industry. The demand therefore must be met by our present labour force participants – male and female.

The money is there

On average, jobs in technology and the skilled trades pay double what traditional female occupations pay. One young woman who had been working in fashion design changed her career and took training in operating a front end loader that is used to build roads and dig excavations. After one year of training she expects to be making \$25,000 a year. Not all these jobs pay that well, but the majority provide an adequate living wage.

The opportunities are there

Most people who work in technology and the skilled trades have excellent opportunities for future career development. Many employers provide further training on the job that leads to better jobs and promotions. Opportunities to move into management are possible in the high level skilled occupations.

Other people acquire government jobs where they work as adjustors, consultants and inspectors. There are also many opportunities for people to go into marketing, sales, and small business. The opportunities vary with each occupation and should be a factor to be considered when making a career choice.

How do I know if these jobs are for me?

1. Do you enjoy being active on the job? Many of these occupations provide the opportunity to move freely, to use muscles as well as brains, and to develop physical stamina and endurance. While few jobs require physical strength beyond a woman's capacity, most depend on good physical condition. Of course, many sales and service jobs traditionally held by women, as well as nursing and child care, are physically demanding, and women have proven that this is no problem.
2. Do you enjoy working with your hands? Many of the trades originated as hand crafts and there is still considerable manual dexterity and creativity required in these occupations.
3. Do you enjoy working at a concrete task and applying yourself until it is successfully completed? The practical orientation of this kind of work often lends itself to providing the satisfaction of seeing a job well done.
4. Do you enjoy working outdoors? Many jobs in construction, mining and environmental technology require people to work in the natural environment. Women are now working as loggers as well as mail deliverers and park attendants. Most repair and maintenance people also travel from place to place all day during the course of their work.
5. Do you enjoy problem solving, working with arithmetic, and making decisions based on your own special knowledge and experience? Do you like to feel like a pro? This is an important element of many of the occupations referred to in this pamphlet.

How can I find out more?

1. Talk to people who are already employed in the trades.
2. Visit your local community college and pick up some training brochures. Talk to the people in the student services department. A tour of the sections where training takes place as well as interviews with teachers and students can often be arranged.
3. Visit your local Canada Employment Centre, which has information on the jobs in your area. Free employment counselling and testing can also be provided upon request.
4. Read about the jobs. In your library, you will find the *Canadian Classification Dictionary of Occupations* which provides detailed information on 7,000 jobs, the training required, personal qualities needed, and a description of the activity and environment. Similar information can be obtained from the Ontario Women's Bureau *Career Selector*. This publication covers 180 occupations and includes information on salaries and wages. Also available from the Bureau is a kit called *But . . . What Else Can a Woman Be?* which contains a set of newspaper articles featuring women in non-traditional occupations.
5. Visit the workplace. If possible, talk to employees and get a hands on experience.

What kind of training will I need?

Training for occupations in trades and technology involves learning both the practical specialized skills you will need, as well as developing a general base of knowledge which applies to that occupation. You will be expected to have a knowledge of math and English at a level that is appropriate for the training you require. Should you lack this knowledge, you may want to seek upgrading at your local high school or community college.

In many cases the learning experience will take the form of an apprenticeship. However, there are training programs where no apprenticeship is necessary.

What is apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship is a formal skill training experience where you learn on the job from a person who is qualified as a master in the craft you wish to learn. This person is called a journeyman. The length of training varies from two to five years. As an apprentice, your employer would pay you a percentage of a journeyman's wage, which would increase each year, generally reaching 90 per cent in the final year. The pay can never, however, be lower than the legal minimum wage.

All but 10 per cent of the training consists of on-the-job learning. The remainder is provided at a community college. Employment Canada will usually pay your tuition fees and cover some of your related expenses during the in-school portion of your apprenticeship.

In order to enter an apprenticeship program, you should be at least 16 years of age, physically fit, and have a grade 10 education. A grade 12 education is usually preferred. Adults who lack the minimum education requirements can be evaluated by a Progressive Achievement Test. This test, along with the program as a whole, is administered by the Apprenticeship Branch of the Ministry of Education/Colleges and Universities. For further information, contact the local office of this branch in your area. Their booklet, *Apprenticeship and You* is available free of charge.

Other kinds of skill training

Community college programs

Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology provide vocational and technological training leading to two- and three-year diplomas and one-year certificates. A Grade 12 Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma is required for entry into these programs. However, if you are over 19 years of age, you may enter as a mature student, provided you meet minimum academic proficiency requirements. Part-time as well as full-time courses are available.

The Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) administers provincial and federal government grants, loans and bursaries to help students who require financial assistance. Educational costs will include tuition fees, transportation, books and student supplies. Information about this plan is available from the Student Awards Officer at your local community college.

The Canada Manpower Training Program

Employment and Immigration Canada (CEIC) provides adult training for people seeking re-employment and is designed to help them increase their earning capacity. Those who apply must be one year over the school-leaving age and must also have been out of school for at least 12 months.

Training can take place at a community college and, if you are eligible, CEIC will pay your tuition fees and will provide a living allowance or unemployment insurance benefits. In some cases, travel expenses will also be covered.

If training on the job is preferred, and a sponsoring employer can be found, CEIC will pay a percentage of your salary and part of your instructor's salary as well.

For further information, inquire at your local Canada Employment Centre.

Pre-trades training

Many women are unfamiliar with handling tools and working in a trade environment. If this is your situation, you may be interested in taking a pre-trades course, which will give you the opportunity to explore this whole area of work, and help you determine if it is right for you.

A program called Introduction to Non-Traditional Occupations (INTO) is available to help women prepare for training in the trades and technology field. INTO courses are offered at most community colleges across the province. They are eight weeks long, and students attend full time, five days a week. Tuition fees are paid by CEIC. The INTO course includes self assessment, assertiveness training, job search techniques, and a hands-on experience in a real working environment.

Since some men are equally unfamiliar with this working environment, a similar program for both men and women is offered at George Brown College in Toronto.

For further information, inquire at your local community college or Canada Employment Centre.

What about unions?

Many people working in trades and technology are unionized. Union membership in Canada now exceeds two million.

Whether or not you are required to join a union depends on the terms agreed upon between the workers and the employer. In addition, some trades, generally in the area of construction, require union membership as a condition of certification.

There are different types of union agreements which will affect your membership.

1. If there is a 'closed shop' the employer agrees to hire only workers who are already members of the union.
2. In a 'union shop', workers are required to join the union after an initial probationary period.
3. The 'Rand Formula' or 'agency shop' provides that employees must pay dues but are not required to join the union. This plan is based on the notion that as all employees benefit from the activities of the union, all should contribute to its maintenance.

When you enroll in a training program, it is advisable to investigate union membership requirements.

Other factors to consider

Traditional attitudes

Unfortunately many people still feel uncomfortable about women working in occupations which have traditionally been reserved for men. While many of the old distinctions between men's work and women's work are rapidly disappearing, some of these attitudes still persist. This can make it difficult sometimes for a woman to convince employers and counsellors, family and friends that she is capable of doing this kind of work. You may have to persuade people that you have a serious commitment and that you will not require special treatment because you are woman. You may also wish to remind people that many women across the province, and across Canada, are already performing these jobs successfully.

Discrimination

The field of technology and the skilled trades is a new frontier for women and it is possible that you may meet with some kind of discrimination because you are a woman. The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits sexual discrimination in hiring, training and promotion. Should you have reason to believe that you have been subject to discrimination, contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission office in your area.

Shift work

Some jobs require shift work, which could present a problem for you, especially if you must arrange for the care of children. For information on home day care and day care centres that have extended hours, check the municipal government listing for your local social services department.

Heavy lifting

In most cases, lifting devices, trolleys and mechanical levers now make it possible to do most of these jobs without putting excessive strain on the body. However, some jobs still require a fair degree of physical strength. The technique of lifting can be learned and improved with practice. It is important to remember that certain occupations traditionally held by women – child care, waitressing and nursing – also require considerable strength and stamina.

Location

Some jobs require you to travel long distances to work each day. You may need a car, which is an affordable item if wages are sufficiently high. In some cases you may have to move where the jobs are located.

Environment

In some instances, the working environment for these occupations can be noisy, dirty and involve some risk. The new Occupational Health and Safety Act in Ontario is designed to ensure that these hazards are not excessive and dangerous to your health. Some conditions are more hazardous if you are pregnant. The Ontario Ministry of Labour can provide you with information on this subject. Once again, remember that the working environment for some traditionally female jobs is not without hazards.

This pamphlet has been prepared to provide women with an overview of employment opportunities in technology and the skilled trades. If you are interested in this field and wish to pursue it further, we suggest that you contact your local community college or Canada Employment Centre.

Women's Bureau publications mentioned in this pamphlet are available to Ontario residents, free of charge. Please contact:

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